

April 2005 Stakeholder Design Workshop Summary

Prepared for:

The Seattle Department of Transportation

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Introduction

The Mercer Corridor Project, led by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), is being conducted to determine transportation improvements along the Mercer Corridor from I-5 to Dexter Avenue. The project's purpose is to improve local safety, access, and circulation for vehicles and pedestrians, accommodate economic growth and neighborhood livability within the South Lake Union urban center, and improve the connection from I-5 to and through South Lake Union.

A preliminary preferred alternative has been identified. As part of the city's efforts to ensure that the preferred alternative provides a balanced approach to accommodate all modes and is designed in a way that is sensitive to the City and neighborhood vision for South Lake Union, a design workshop was convened to listen to stakeholder ideas and concerns regarding how the preferred alternative should "function, look, and feel."

This report summarizes the small group discussions that generated comments on how the preferred alternative should function, look, and feel. The purpose of the small group discussion was to brainstorm and discuss ideas, concerns and questions about functional and urban design elements of the preliminary preferred alternative.

Twenty-five people, who represent the diverse range of interests within and outside the project area, were invited to attend. Seventeen people attended the workshop.

Participants

The following is a list of the interest groups and business representatives who attended the workshop:

SLUFAN
Cascade Neighborhood Council
Seattle Center
Seattle Parks Foundation
Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board
Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board
Seattle Design Commission
Daniel's Broiler
Outback Steakhouse
Vulcan
Copiers Northwest
JAT Business Plans
Kenmore Air
Uptown Alliance/Queen Anne Community Council
Shurgard
Seattle Biomedical Research Institute
Swartz Brothers Restaurants
Gregory Broderick Smith Real Estate

Workshop Format

The workshop was held on Wednesday, April 6, 2005 from 4:00 – 7:00 p.m. at the Armory in South Lake Union Park at 860 Terry Avenue North. After a brief welcome, participants were introduced to the workshop purpose and objectives. Following that, an overview of the project was presented including: a description of the alternative, how different user modes will be accommodated, and a discussion of some of the tradeoffs being considered. After the presentation, participants were divided into two smaller groups for a discussion of the functional elements of the alternative. After the small group discussions concluded, the entire group reconvened to report the results of their discussions, and to hear a presentation on the urban design possibilities for the Mercer Corridor. After the urban design presentation, participants were again split into two small groups for a discussion on the urban design elements of the alternative. Finally, the entire group reconvened to report the results of the urban design discussions and to conclude the workshop. The workshop agenda is included in Appendix A of this report.

In each small group, a facilitator led the participants through a discussion of the functional and urban design elements of the alternative. Technical project team members were available in each group to clarify questions about the alternative.

Small Group Discussion

Meeting attendees were split into groups of 8-9 members. Both groups were provided the same information and asked the same questions. The differences in the two groups' interpretations of the questions and their respective responses are reflected the following sections. The facilitator notes from each discussion are provided in Appendix B of this report.

Function Discussion - Group #1 Summary

In regards to the preliminary preferred alternative's ability to function for all modes, Group #1 discussed a number of issues related to freight, bicycles, pedestrians, and traffic.

Freight

The group identified a number of issues that the design needs to address in order for it to accommodate freight movement and access. The group wanted to know if there would be turning restrictions at the Fairview/Mercer intersection and if there would be enough room for trucks to turn onto Broad Street from 9th Avenue. There was also concern that Westlake Avenue north of Mercer Street would be too narrow for truck traffic.

Bicycles

The group's discussion on bicycles focused on the Potlatch Trail and Harrison Street. Comments indicated that the Potlatch Trail, and the current setbacks specifically for it on Roy Street, needs to be considered in the design of the alternative. It was also mentioned that Harrison Street is important for both bikes and pedestrians.

Pedestrians

The group's discussion on pedestrians touched on a number of issues including safety, traffic, and sidewalks. A pedestrian overpass (over Mercer) was suggested as one way to address safety and reduce congestion. However, one group member indicated that pedestrian overpasses isolate pedestrians and sends the signal that the area is not safe. This person also said that other safety measures should be incorporated to keep pedestrians at grade and in the mix with other modes. It was said that the Mercer median would address some safety concerns, as would timed pedestrian crossing signals, vibrating/audible pedestrian crossing signals, and on-street parking. Some group members said that wide Mercer sidewalks would not be used by pedestrians because Mercer will feel like a "walled" corridor, and that they should go elsewhere. Others said that people will use Mercer street sidewalks, especially with the addition of retail.

Traffic

The group's discussion on traffic touched on capacity and reconnecting the street grid. There was some concern that capacity is not being increased, especially for eastbound traffic, and that the proposed traffic signals will further slow down traffic. In general, the group agreed that the corridor should be designed to accommodate all modes; however, there was some disagreement on whether or not traffic and capacity should be the focus. Some said that it should focus on capacity while others indicated that seeking to maximize capacity is not the best approach for the neighborhood as a whole, and that whatever the capacity is it will ultimately be filled. Specific suggestions for dealing with the capacity issue included developing a two-way Mercer with two lanes westbound and five lanes eastbound or removing the parking lane from the south side of Mercer in order to add another travel lane.

The group said that reconnecting surface streets will provide an alternative for local east/west traffic, but may also result in putting too much traffic on neighborhood side streets.

Function Discussion - Group #2 Summary

In regards to the preliminary preferred alternative's ability to function for all modes, Group #2 indicated that the alternative was on track, but that "the devil would be in the details." The discussion focused mainly on traffic. Other topics of discussion included bicycles, freight, and parking.

Traffic

In general, the group said that the alternative should not focus solely on moving traffic through the corridor, but should instead take a balanced approach for all modes of transportation. The group indicated that tradeoffs will need to be made to achieve a coherent, well-designed, mixed use corridor. Participants were concerned that putting too much traffic on Mercer Street will result in too much congestion on cross streets. They also said that looking at the entire grid as part of a solution is important, and that Fairview, Republican, and Valley are important streets to reconnect into the grid system. The group also said that aggressive Travel Demand Management (TDM) is needed to get people out of their cars, and that Denny Way should not be viewed as an alternative route for Mercer Street because it is already experiencing congestion problems.

Bicycles

Group comments about bicycles indicated pleasure with the alternative's provision of bike lanes on Valley Street, and a desire to see bike lanes continued on Fairview in order to connect to the U District. Participants also said that adequate signaling, signage, and pavement painting should be used to inform drivers and bicyclists about bike lanes, and that mode separation should be considered in order to minimize bicycle exposure to traffic.

Freight

Comments about freight illustrated a concern with the intersection configuration at 9th and Westlake, with one comment being made that the truck route currently designated for Westlake should go on 9th Street instead. There was also some concern about the future use of 9th, specifically if it will be two-way.

Parking

The discussion on parking indicated that the group believed there is no one “right” answer for parking on Mercer Street. The group said that there are trade-offs: parking can make it feel safe for pedestrians because of the barrier it provides to moving traffic, however, parking may slow down traffic and may be dangerous on what will be a busy arterial. The group recommended a flexible approach, and said that installing permanent parking lane bulb outs would reduce flexibility. The group said that one solution might be to allow off-peak parking.

Other comments

- Concern that one lane in each direction on Valley Street will not be enough to accommodate local neighborhood traffic
- The proposed alternative generally improves access to property within the corridor

Look and Feel Discussion - Group #1 Summary

Group #1's discussion on how the Mercer Corridor should be designed from a look and feel perspective included: identifying unifying design themes; refining the gateway concept; differentiating Mercer and Valley streets; and lighting, landscaping, and signage.

Unifying themes

It was mentioned that the Mercer Corridor project should consider the maritime/industrial character that is identified in the South Lake Union neighborhood Plan and the current Terry Street Design Guidelines. Other comments about incorporating themes into the project's design included:

- New design should reflect historic themes
- The design should be substantial and bold, not too refined
- Establishing a theme is a way to identify the neighborhood

- Consider a maritime theme
- Take cues from the design character of the South Lake Union park design

Refining the gateway concept

In general, the group liked the idea of a central art piece, and had specific ideas for its location, as well as other ideas for incorporating art into the corridor.

Gateway comments:

- The gateway should be part of the neighborhood not the freeway
- The gateway art piece could be at the entrance at Fairview from I-5
- Incorporate gateway concept in the median on Mercer Street
- Put the gateway element on one of the north/south streets looking towards Lake Union, for the lake perspective

Art comments:

- Art could be used to direct traffic
- Art can contribute to the pedestrian experience
- Scale of art is important – for pedestrians or traffic – and will need to vary depending on location
- The neighborhood deserves a grand art gesture

Differentiating Mercer and Valley streets

The group made a number of comments about how the design should reflect the different personalities of Mercer and Valley Streets. In summary, there were suggestions that Valley Street design should have a park feel and that the Mercer Street design should respond to a more active and busier, multi-use feel. Specific comments included:

- Valley Street should have a resort-like or soft entrance so it has a park feel and focus
- Valley Street should have its own unique feel, different than Mercer, Eastlake, and Westlake
- Valley Street design should tie into South Lake Union Park
- The emphasis on Mercer should be on capacity instead of pedestrian design
- The Mercer Street design needs to accommodate a “busy” atmosphere

Lighting, landscaping, and signage

The group talked about lighting, landscaping, and signage both in terms of how they should reflect the overall design of the corridor, and how they should function. Specific comments included:

- The median strip on Mercer could be enhanced with lighting
- Pylons, pavers, and other physical elements could have neighborhood theme incorporated into their design to identify the neighborhood
- Use brickwork or texturizing to delineate crosswalks (not paint)
- Lighting other than regular overhead street lighting is needed

- Need pedestrian lighting on sidewalk so people will use the area at night
- Landscaping should be as maintenance free as possible
- Plantings/planters should be near crosswalks, be easily removable, and be composed of native and drought tolerant plants
- Evergreen trees are a good low maintenance option for the Mercer median

Other comments

- The Fairview/Valley area is too valuable to be used for the streetcar maintenance barn; Consider the City Light building on 8th, or some other place that is not as prominent
- The area could be a recreation magnet that compliments the Seattle Center, and so must be connected for bikes and pedestrians with street crossings, sidewalks, and lighting

Look and Feel Discussion - Group #2 Summary

Group #2's discussion on how the Mercer Corridor should be designed from a look and feel perspective echoed their discussion on the corridor's functional design. They said the design should consider all modes and the neighborhood itself, focusing on "beautiful infrastructure" necessary to create a successful urban neighborhood, and be flexible to future needs. Specific topics of discussion included looking at other successful design examples, identifying unifying design themes, refining the gateway concept, and lighting and signage.

Other successful design examples

The group suggested a number of other examples to consider when designing the Mercer Corridor, including:

- San Francisco's Embarcadero Boulevard
- Vancouver, British Columbia's Yaletown Neighborhood (for integrating housing, retail, and parking into the corridor)
- Boston's Freedom Trail (for incorporating design elements into sidewalks)
- Tokyo's and Yokohama's LED displays that lay out upcoming cross streets (for signage examples)

Unifying themes

The group identified a number of ideas for incorporating themes into the design, including:

- Maritime heritage
- Native American art
- Sustainability: emphasizing bicycles, permeable roadway edges, swales, trees on both sides of valley, solar-powered LED lighting
- Water: celebrate the presence of water in the neighborhood and the City of Seattle
- South Lake Union Park: highlight the park and its role as a community gathering place

Refining the gateway concept

In general, the group liked the idea of a defining gateway, and offered some suggestions to refine it, including:

- Ensure the gateway design is not distracting to drivers who are exiting the freeway at high speeds
- Consider the gateway as an information source (signage, directions) and as part of a theme that occurs throughout the neighborhood
- Consider a secondary gateway at the Dexter/Mercer intersection

Lighting and signage

The group identified lighting and signage as important design elements to both expedite traffic flow through the neighborhood and to establish the neighborhood's presence within the framework of the larger city. A number of suggestions were offered, including:

- Provide directional signs to other neighborhoods and to neighborhood assets, amenities, and landmarks
- Use lighting to create a safe and festive atmosphere
- Conduct a design charrette to consider new signage for the area
- Include design features that signal or communicate, such as distinctive paving at crosswalks

Other comments

- Design in space for outdoor amenities
- Provide a cohesive look throughout the corridor
- Use high quality materials
- Use indigenous/native fauna

Appendix A – Workshop Agenda

mercercorridorproject

“How should the Mercer Corridor function, look, and feel?”

**Design Workshop
South Lake Union Armory
April 6, 4:00 – 7:00 p.m.**

Agenda

Description: A workshop to provide updated information on the preferred alternative and to initiate a design process for the preferred alternative.

Purpose: To provide information about the preferred alternative, and its opportunities and constraints. To identify urban design themes that will help to ensure the selected alternative fits into the South Lake Union neighborhood.

<u>Agenda Topic</u>	<u>Presenter(s)</u>	<u>Time</u>
1. Welcome	Eric Tweit	5 mins.
2. Workshop Overview	Chris Hoffman	5 mins.
3. Mercer Project Overview <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The preferred alternative• City Council direction	Eric Tweit	10 mins.
4. Functional Considerations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constraints and opportunities	Eric Tweit	20 mins.
5. Small Groups Breakout <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What should be included to make the alternative function for pedestrians, bicycles, freight, and transit?		25 mins.
6. Report out	Chris Hoffman	10 mins.
7. Break		10 mins.
8. Potential urban design options <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urban design examples and opportunities	Mark Hinshaw	25 mins.
9. Small group breakouts <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How should the Mercer Corridor look and feel for all users?		40 mins.
10. Report out	Chris Hoffman	15 mins.



Appendix B – Facilitator Notes

Group #1 Discussion Notes

Function

- Will there be turning restrictions at Fairview/Mercer intersection?
- Extra long trailers cause delays for pedestrians and traffic
- Are there City restrictions on truck travel?
- Truck delivery considerations need to be part of this project design
- Westlake Ave, north of Mercer, is too narrow for truck traffic
- 24 hours truck traffic is preferable on 9th
- Is there enough room for a truck to turn off of 9th onto Broad or Roy Street heading west
- Is project planning to accommodate the Potlatch trail?
- Harrison is important to bikes and pedestrians
- Vision for Potlatch trail is beyond regular sidewalk
- There are currently setbacks for Potlatch trail on Roy that need to be considered in the design of this project
- Signal timing – balancing needs of pedestrians and cars
- Current light at Westlake and Valley is too long
- What about a pedestrian overpass (over Mercer) to reduce congestion and for pedestrian safety
- Pedestrian Advisory Committee actually prefers that pedestrians remain at grade – when traffic and pedestrians are separated, it creates the perception that it isn't safe. PAC would rather use other means to improve pedestrian safety
- There are safety issues for pedestrians crossing Mercer
- New Mercer median mitigates some of the safety issues
- Countdown signals for pedestrians are needed (identifying both the time until crosswalk is on and how much time is left for pedestrians to cross)
- Vibrating/audible signals are needed to accommodate ADA
- Slowing traffic, bike lane and parking lane are all good for pedestrians on Mercer
- Wide sidewalks should be elsewhere – Mercer won't get used by pedestrians
- Feels like a walled corridor along Mercer, which isn't a pleasant experience
- Mercer sidewalks will get used because the addition of retail and sidewalks will create a good walking area
- Concerned that Mercer capacity is not increasing, particularly for eastbound traffic during evening rush hour. New design has fewer lanes and more traffic signals which will slow traffic
- It will be very hard for pedestrians to cross Mercer during evening rush hours in particular
- Reconnecting surface streets will give people other alternatives (than Mercer) to get across town
- Alternatives still put traffic on streets we are trying to move traffic off

- On Mercer, suggest 5 lanes headed east and 2 lanes headed west
- Remove parking lane on south side of Mercer to allow for another traffic lane

Look and Feel

- SLU Neighborhood Plan is focused on maritime/industrial character of the area - new design should reflect these historic themes
- Nature of the neighborhood is eclectic
- Design should be substantial and bold, not too refined
- Like the idea of a central art piece. Ideas for location:
 - At the Fairview entrance from the freeway
 - Not at freeway, but in neighborhood, to contribute to neighborhood, possibly at Terry.
 - On median strips on Mercer
 - On one of the north/south streets looking up towards Lake Union for the lake view perspective
 - Could be neighborhood icon in SLU Park
- Art in park
- Art could be used to direct traffic
- Artsy overpass at Terry, with a possible mini-lawn or coffee shop
- Evergreen trees would be a good lower maintenance option than other trees
- Current Terry design guidelines should be considered
- Create Valley to be like a resort entrance, so it has a park feel and focus
- Valley should have a very different feel than Eastlake and Westlake
- Focus on Eastlake and Westlake pivot points
- Anchor points connecting district
- Art can contribute to pedestrian experience and draw
- Armory is tying park north and south
- Scale of art is important – for pedestrians or traffic? Will vary depending on site
- Median strip on Mercer could be enhanced with lighting
- Put signs in median on Mercer that announce upcoming cross street
- Concrete pylons could have brand (neighborhood theme) detail – this pedestrian décor would be a way to identify the neighborhood
- Use something different than just yellow paint to delineate crosswalks – some suggestions include brickwork, texturizing
- Lighting other than regular residential overhead street lighting is needed
- Need pedestrian lighting on sidewalk – people will then use area at night
- Median should be as maintenance free as possible
 - Plantings nearer to crosswalks
 - Planters that are easily removable
 - Natives and drought tolerant plants
- Planting strips along sidewalks – greenery, but high maintenance
- Will Mercer be attractive for sidewalk cafes?
- Vulcan will be developing retail on Mercer between Fairview and Terry
- Can see pedestrians on side streets also if Mercer is developed and well used

- Fairview/Terry is too valuable as a piece of land to use for a trolley maintenance barn. Couldn't the City Light building on 8th be used for this purpose? Or could part of this maintenance barn be underground or tucked inside the area with retail on other outer edges of this corner space
- Neighborhood has never had a unified theme – unifying with design/art would be good
- Neighborhood deserves a grand art gesture
- Maritime theme
- Look beyond freeway exit/entrance
- Could have a gateway piece at Mercer/Fairview as you come off freeway so you can't miss it
- Possibilities for creative land exchanges between City and Vulcan
- Proof that it is pedestrian friendly – improves on what is there now
- Respect the general design character of SLU neighborhood park – balance cars and pedestrian experience
- Demonstrate it can carry traffic flow
- Need to consider long-term development
- Brick/nautical theme
- Capacity for eastbound Mercer is lacking – will only get worse in future
- Area could be recreation magnet – a second pull to Seattle Center. Must be connected for bikes and pedestrians with street crossings, activated sidewalks, lighting and urban center
- Need residential and need developers to build good commercial space

Group # 2 Discussion Notes

Function

- The devil's in the details but the general plan is on track
- The general plan is ok but the truck route designated for Westlake should go on 9th
- Concern about the future uses of 9th, specifically about whether it will be two-way
- Concern about the use/configuration of the intersections at 9th and Westlake
- Too much traffic on Mercer will result in increased traffic on adjacent side and cross streets as drivers get impatient
- Aggressive traffic demand management (TDM) is needed to get more people out of their cars
- Studies of the psychological dimension of driving in traffic show that well designed, pleasant streetscapes lessen driver impatience. The City has the opportunity to create more pleasant conditions with the Mercer Corridor redesign
- Very pleased to see the provision of bike lanes along Valley providing an East-West connection. Would like to see the bike lane continue along Fairview to provide connection to the U District
- In the Mercer Corridor, provide signaling, signage, pavement painting and structural segregation to make bike lanes and crossings very clear to drivers

- Lessen the physical exposure of bikes to traffic
- Don't look to Denny as a solution to traffic congestion on Mercer. Traffic conditions on Denny also need improvement
- Fairview, Republican and Valley are important streets in the Mercer Corridor "grid." The Mercer Corridor redesign will help reconnect the grid of streets near Mercer
- The Mercer Corridor redesign involves tradeoffs between moving traffic and providing a coherent, well-designed, mixed-use corridor possibly with retail businesses, landscaping, and parking. The quantity of traffic moving through the corridor and the quality of the corridor itself are both important
- Concern that too much emphasis will be put on "shoving" traffic and freight down Mercer
- Vehicles traveling to Capitol Hill in the right lane will have to sit in traffic with the three-lane configuration
- Providing parking along Mercer will entail trade-offs: parking will slow the flow of traffic and could be dangerous near the freeway but is essential for retail businesses and makes the area safer for pedestrians. Approach the issues of parking and lane use with flexibility
- Is one lane each way on Valley sufficient to accommodate the established volume of local, neighborhood traffic? People making local trips will use Valley to avoid Mercer
- The proposed alternative for corridor redesign generally improves property access

Look and Feel

- The redevelopment of the Mercer Corridor provides "a great opportunity to make strong and beautiful infrastructure"
- The Mercer Corridor doesn't have to be just about traffic. Take into account sidewalks, retail businesses, parking, medians and design elements
- Integrate housing, retail business, and bicycle and pedestrian access in the corridor to create a successful urban neighborhood such as Yaletown in Vancouver, B.C.
- Examine the design, look and feel of successful urban corridors such as the Embarcadero in San Francisco
- Incorporate design elements that reflect the maritime and Native American heritage of the area
- Design in sustainability by emphasizing bicycle transportation, permeable road way edges, swales to handle surface water runoff and by planting trees on both sides of Valley. Celebrate water visibly and creatively. Provide solar powered/energy-conserving LED lighting
- In designing the Mercer Corridor, including Valley Street, highlight the proximity of the South Lake Union Park as a community gathering place
- Designating wide rights of way now will enable flexibility in the future
- Construct a walkway all around Lake Union
- Pay attention to lighting in the corridor to create a safe and festive atmosphere
- Conduct a design charrette to consider new signage for the corridor

- Consider incorporating design elements into sidewalks such as, for example, the Freedom Trail in Boston
- The look and feel of Mercer should be “formal” with flexibility and creative design in other areas such as along Valley
- Design in space for outdoor amenities (tables) along the sidewalks on Valley
- Provide a design that is “cohesive” for the Mercer Corridor area
- Plant indigenous/native flora
- Use high quality materials. The choice of materials will determine the look and feel of the corridor long into the future. Avoid standard issue materials
- Provide visibly distinctive paving at cross walks
- The city should proceed with implementing the concept of the Mercer “gateway”
Be careful, however, to ensure that the gateway design is not dangerously distracting for drivers who have just exited the freeway’s high-speed traffic
- Make directional signs, particularly at the gateway, highly visible
- Near the gateway, consider installing the type of LED screens in use in Tokyo and Yokohama that lay out the grid of upcoming streets
- Provide directional signs to neighborhoods (e.g. Fremont, Ballard) and to neighborhood assets, amenities, and landmarks. Design in wayfinding information
- Take advantage at the Dexter intersection of the design elements initiated at the gateway
- Design in a transition of scale and speed in that section of the corridor drivers first enter from the freeway - that section before and after the gateway
- Pay attention to street lights and their timing. Coordinated signaling expedites traffic flow